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Response to Microwave Alert

U.S. Screening Out Soviet 'Listening' Rays

MOSCOW (UPI) — Workmen have begun installing wire mesh screens on windows at the U.S. Embassy, apparently to shield American diplomats and their families from possibly harmful microwaves beamed at the building by Soviet agents.

Despite freezing temperatures, workmen have spent the past several days unsealing dozens of double windows in the nine-story embassy and placing mesh on the outside, diplomats said.

Visitors said the screens appeared to be the standard variety used to keep out insects. Presumably the screens would deflect or at least interfere with any waves directed at the windows.

THERE WAS NO official comment on the purpose of the screens, but their appearance in midwinter coincided with news reports the building was being subjected to microwave radiation.

The reports said Soviet intelligence agents were using the waves to listen to conversations in the embassy, to activate hidden listening devices or perhaps to counteract American debugging equipment.

Officials told members of the American community Tuesday they faced no "significant danger" from microwave radiation in those parts of the embassy frequented by nondiplomatic personnel, such as the snack bar or nursery.

BUT THE officials refused to reply when asked if this meant there was danger to those who frequented other, more secure parts of the embassy.

They did say, however, that a technician had begun reviewing medical records of embassy staff and their families and had started taking white blood cell counts of personnel, although the exact effect of microwave radiation on the human body is not known.

No diplomats have left the Soviet Union in the past 10 months for medical reasons connected with radiation, they said.

The officials refused to discuss any details of the microwaves — such as when or how they had been detected, what sort of counts, if any, had been registered or where the waves were coming from.